

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 12, 2011

Agenda Item: 2011 Proposed Wolf Season, Quotas and HD Boundaries

Division: Fish & Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Proposed Rule

Time Needed for Presentation: 30 minutes

Background: Wolf management in Montana will once again become the full responsibility of the state when the 2009 federal rule is republished in the Federal Register, which must occur by mid-June. The new law also excludes the Congressional delisting action from judicial review. Regulated public harvest of wolves was endorsed by the Governor's Wolf Advisory Council in 2000 and is included in Montana's wolf conservation and management plan.

The commission first adopted regulations and seasons in 2008 based on a wolf harvest model that included rates of birth, death, immigration and emigration being equal to the previous year's rates. A conservative quota of 75 wolves was adopted for the 2009 season. That wolf hunting season, Montana's first, closed about two weeks early with a legal harvest of 72 animals. The minimum wolf count increased in 2009 from 497 to 524 wolves.

For the 2010 season, which was blocked by a court ruling, the FWP commission adopted a statewide quota of 186 in 13 wolf management units (WMUs). Modeling predicted a 13 percent reduction in year-end minimum wolf counts. WMUs or subquotas were adopted to limit early season backcountry harvest and/or harvest north of Yellowstone National Park. An archery-only season, limited to no more than 20 percent of the quota, was also adopted. Only legal hunting harvest would count towards quotas and quota over-runs were to be subtracted from a nearby unit or statewide quotas.

The 2011 proposal reflects the 2010 process with an increased statewide quota of 220 and an additional WMU in the Bitterroot. Except for calendar rotation of dates, other proposed season elements are unchanged from the 2010 adoption. Modeling predicts this quota will result in a 25% percent reduction from the 2010 minimum of 566 to the model estimate of 425. A competing model predicts a 7% decline. Objectives of the season proposal are: 1) maintain a viable and connected wolf population in Montana; 2) gain and maintain authority for Montana to manage wolves; 3) maintain positive and effective working relationships with livestock producers, hunters, and other stakeholders; 4a) reduce wolf impacts on livestock; 4b) reduce wolf impacts on big game populations; 4c) maintain sustainable hunter opportunity for wolves; 4d) maintain sustainable hunter opportunity for ungulates; 5) increase broad public acceptance of sustainable harvest and hunter opportunity as part of wolf conservation; 6) enhance open and effective communication to better inform decisions and; 7) learn and improve as we go.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Public comment will run through Monday, June 20, with a final commission decision set for July 14.

Alternatives and Analysis: Larger and smaller quotas and WMUs and other refinements were considered but are not proposed at this time as they do not clearly and significantly enhance season fit to circumstances and objectives when considered in light of added regulation complexity.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The proposal is aligned with known biology, management history, survey efforts, and public comment.

Proposed Motion: I move to adopt the proposed 2011 wolf season, quotas and hunting district boundaries as presented by FWP.